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Meaning in Narrative: A Franco-Newfoundland Version of AaTh 480 *(The Spinning-Women by the Spring)* and AaTh 510 *(Cinderella* and *Cap O'Rushes)*

This essay is part of a continuing examination of the meaning of Franco-Newfoundland märchen, the theoretical framework of which derives from the late Bengt Holbek's thesis expounded in his *Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (Holbek 1987). In adapting Holbek's thesis, I have both simplified and modified his comprehensive synthesis of Märchen interpretation, opting to stress the following three elements as most relevant to the Franco-Newfoundland context: (1) the early-life crises inherent in märchen as Holbek defines the sub-genre (i. e. tales of magic ending in marriage)[1]; (2) the tale roles of significance in these early-life crises[2]; and (3) the symbolic interpretation of the so-called magical elements within these tales[3]. I argue that the validity of an interpretation based on these three elements depends on its greater or lesser relevance to the narrative context; in other words, for an interpretation to be plausible, it must reflect realities of the social milieu in which a tale is, or was, told.

The version of the tale to be analysed, a not uncommon combination of two tale types[4], has been published in both French and English editions of an earlier study of the Franco-Newfoundland narrative tradition (Thomas 1983, 1993). *The Old Witch and the Ball of Wool*, as its narrator named it, was told by Mrs Angela Kerfont (1915–91), of Cape St George, Port-au-Port Peninsula, one of twenty-one tales told by her and her friend Mrs Blanche Ozon (1907–84) in two sessions at Mrs Ozon's home in late 1972. At the time of the recording, Mrs Kerfont was 57, Mrs Ozon, 65. Both ladies were widows, and both recalled having heard the tale first while in their teen years, i. e. in the period 1920–30,

[1] Holbek 1987, 452.
[2] ibid., 347, and particularly 416–434, in which he discusses the system of tale roles present in fairy tales, eight of which he identifies.
[3] ibid., 435, 452.
[4] The combination of AaTh 480: The Spinning-Women by the Spring, and AaTh 510: Cinderella and Cap O'Rushes, is not commented in The Types of the Folktale (Aarne/Thompson 1961), but it is certainly a common combination in French tradition. In their analysis of AaTh 480, Delarue/Tenèze (1964) note that this tale "se continue par le T. 510A (Cendrillon)" (191) and record nine French examples of the combination (199).

with frequent retellings in subsequent decades[5]. The fact that long, complex folktales could still be heard at the very end of the twentieth century, when their disappearance from western tradition had been predicted since early in the nineteenth century, is not simply due to apparent isolation. It is my contention that folktale collectors would generally visit a community long enough only to have identified to them the locally well-known, or public, storytellers, whose tales they would record to the best of their abilities. They rarely stayed long enough to get to know the people well and gain access to the private or family tradition. When public storytelling disappeared, the assumption was that storytelling had disappeared entirely; but it has survived for so long precisely because of the private or family dimension of the narrative tradition.

It bears noting that while the telling of Märchen is still practiced by some French Newfoundlanders, it is certainly no longer common, and certainly not a vital, functioning part of adult social activity, as it used to be up to the Second World War. Many important changes occurred in Newfoundland society during and following the war years, the net effect of which was both to modify social realities and to disrupt the tradition of Märchen narration inherited chiefly from nineteenth century France. Like most rural or peasant cultures, that of French Newfoundlanders had been conservative, family-oriented, focussed in this context on the fishery and related subsistence agriculture, and anchored in a simple but firm religious faith (Thomas 1976; id. 1983, 48 f., 53 f.; id. 1993, 35 f., 42 f.).

The recording session took place in Mrs Ozon's home, a tiny, single-storey wood-frame house set back from the road, which included a scullery, a bedroom, a kitchen-cum-living room, ‹le grand boute› as it was called, in which a large, old-fashioned cast-iron stove was set against one wall. The stove both heated the house and served her cooking needs. Opposite the stove was a kitchen table, one side against the wall, and around the other three sides of which were three chairs, where we sat during the evening. Between the entrance to the house and the 'grand boute' was a small vestibule where one left one's coat and shoes prior the entering the kitchen, and in which was placed a slop-pail, as the house lacked other forms of sanitation.

The session at which this tale was recorded began at about eight o'clock at night. Mrs Kerfont was seated on a rocking chair opposite the facing wall, knitting in hand, her face turned for the most part towards her friend, who was

[5] In the period in which I recorded the two storytellers, they often spent the occasional evening together during which, over a few beers and with knitting in hand, they passed the time entertaining one another with songs and stories. In the course of one afternoon and one evening later in the month, Mrs Kerfont told fourteen and a half tales, Mrs Ozon six and a half; the half is explained by the fact that Mrs Ozon began one tale, but after some lapses of memory, asked Mrs Kerfont to complete it, which she did. It was my experience with the two ladies, both during the recording sessions and at other social moments, which helped me formulate my distinction between the public, and private or family, storytelling traditions amongst French Newfoundlanders.

seated opposite me. She thus had her eyes both on Mrs Kerfont and myself. Because we knew each other quite well by now, it was a lively evening, its jollity not hampered by a few bottles of beer each. Both ladies teased each other constantly, sometimes in the middle of a story, so much so that I was led to recognise a whole series of 'metanarrative devices' which added to the character of the tale-tellings. Some of these devices support moreover the general interpretation of Franco-Newfoundland Märchen proposed here (Thomas 1980; id. 1983, 97–107; id. 1993, 72–79).

At the beginning of the tale, Mrs Kerfont did not want to tell it, while being willing to summarise it for me. She claimed that Mrs Ozon knew it better than she herself did, but Mrs Ozon either would not or could not recall it. Indeed, Mrs Kerfont herself made a small mistake early on (which she later corrected), when she gives to the heroine, Cendrillouse, three step-sisters (perhaps influenced by popular versions of the story). She would have preferred that her friend tell it, in part because she says: "In French it goes better, eh? It goes – it's a French story." But she began to tell the tale following this preliminary[6]. The French title was given by Mrs Ozon, the English title by Mrs Kerfont. Words in French in the text are italicised.

La Vieille Sorciaise et la Pelote de Laine/The Old Witch and the Ball of Wool

It start, it start by a woman an a … a man an a woman, a man and, well, a man an a woman, yes eh? They had … a one daughter, eh? An … the ole woman died, eh? An he got married to another woman an she had tree daughters, eh? An they use to give her misery there.
B.O.: *Oui.*
– That's how it start, eh?
G.T.: Well, how does it go on from there?
– Well, yes. They was jealous of the other – she was pretty, her eh? She was pretty, her. An she ad three and they was ugly as the devils. An now they use to put her – all – *cendes* eh? *A la place*, eh? *A sait, tu sais*!
B.O.: Ah ha ha!
– In French it goes better, eh? It goes – it's a French story.
B.O.: *Moi j'sais pas ça, mignonne*!
– *Ah, tu sais*!

[6] Although Mrs Kerfont was French-speaking, she preferred to tell her tales to me, at least, in English, whereas Mrs Ozon told all hers in French. Both ladies understood each other perfectly well, of course, but it provided the interviewer with a fascinating example of collecting in a macaronic context, that is to say where at least two different languages are constantly in use at the same time, speakers often switching from one language to the other in mid-sentence. This is a phenomenon that has not been adequately studied; in Canada, for example, collectors of French folklore have generally ignored folklore in English, even when held by francophones (see Knight 1972; Thomas 1983, 1993).

B.O.: *J'l'ai entendu souvent mais j'sais pas! J'tais à l'entour d'eune dixaine, eune douzaine d'années quand qu'Olive [Marche] m'a conté ça. J'couchions avec la défunte Marie, j'contais le conte d'la pelote de laine pis j'la faisas rire! Depis ç'temps-là j'l'ai pas entendu.*

– Yes, an the ole woman, she says, she tole her, she tole her, "Tomorrow", she says, "I'm gonna spin you a ball o wool", she says, "an you're gonna go down", she says, "in town", she says, "an get it all knitted to my likin", she says. "An if it's not to my likin", she says, "you know what you're gonna get!" Okay. "I'm gonna take a piece o you now, so as you knows." Anyway, she took off. When she got a ways down the yard, the ball o wool come out of her arms, eh? An it fell, an it started to roll, eh? An it fell in a hole, eh? … That's a thought!

B.O.: Ah ha ha ha!

– An den she run to get her ball o wool, eh? She looked in the hole an saw a *vieille sorciaise là*. Ha ha ha! An ole witch there. She said, she said, "Gimme my ball o wool." An she says, "Come down, my little girl", she says, an she says, "We're gonna make your knittin for you", she said, "the way you want it", she said, "an you'll do our work for us." Good enough. She goes down. Then, er … she had to make the beds, wash the dishes, an cook dinner. She made the beds. So they were knittin there. They were three. So after the beds was made, she says, she asked, the old witch asked the little girl, she says, "How you find my bed, little girl?" She said, "I wish to God I had one like that to sleep every night, I'd be able to sleep all the time", she said. An they use to put all kinds – they use to show her all kinds o things in the wood, all kinds o beasts n everything, eh?

B.O.: *Ouais*.

– But she wouldn have to say – so she washed the dishes. "How do you find my dishes, my little girl?" – "I wish I had dishes like that at home", she says. "I'd be proud of it." Ah well, nice knittin she use to make, all beautiful knittin. An er … an then she cooked dinner. Now she … she made the soup herself, eh? She knowed what she put in, eh? But after the soup was cooked, well, *des garnouilles* an all kinds o beasts to be seen, eh?

B.O.: Ahhh!

– An er … she says, "How do you like my soup, my little girl?" – "I wish I had soup like this at home", she said. "I'd be some proud." Well, they made lovely knittin – oh my God! An they use to like her! But it was seem to her – that it wasn't mean, eh? Okay. "Now", she said, "my little girl", she said, "all your work is done. Your knittin is finished, the way you wanted it", she said. So they pack up her knittin, eh? "Now", she says, "it's time for you to go home", she said. "Ah well", the oldest one, she said, "we know you're pretty", she said, "you'll be ten times prettier!" So the second oldest, "Yes", she said, "you're pretty, an you'll be ten times prettier, an when you talk", she said, "the roses come out o your cheeks."

B.O.: *Phiou! Oh!*

– An the youngest one, "Well", she said, "you know you're pretty, yes, you'll be ten times prettier again", she said – she said, "you'll roll money ahead of you", she said, "when you walks."

B.O.: *Phiou!*

– She took her knittin an off she starts. Oh! – an pretty, s'marder. Anyway, they looks out, the ole lady, she says "Who's comin there?" she says. Be – she says, "That's our sister!" – "Don't be so crazy", she said, "so pretty as that!" She said, "Yes! Oh my!" An she says, "When she gets here, I'm gonna see that ole woman, I'm gonna get my knittin." – "Don't worry", she says – no, she had one daughter, her, that's all. There's a mix, a mix I had there. She had one, her, the ugliest devil. "Well," she says, "tomorrow", she says, "I'm gonna spin you a big ball o wool", she says, "an tomorrow", she says, "an you're gonna go." Okay. She spins a *maudit* big ball o wool for her. "Now", she says,

"tomorrow mornin, you're goin – an get it done to my likin", she says. Okay. She was goin, the ball o wool in her arms – oh! when she got almost in the same place – the ball o wool fall out of her arms – phew! – *dans l'trou*. Then she went for her ball o wool – she said, "Gimme my ball o wool", she said. "Well, my little girl", she said, "come down", she said, "an do some work for us, we'll do your knittin." Okay. She went down. So she had to make the beds, an cook dinner an wash the dishes. So anyhow she made the beds. "My little girl", she said, "how do you find my bed?" – "Well", she said, "I wouldn have it, I wouldn have a bed like that", she said, "because I wouldn leave my dog sleep in a bed like that", she says. They use to put all kinds o things on, eh? It seems to her, eh? They was mean, eh? There was a narry! Risin narry, you know – big holes in him. Okay. Then she washed the dishes. "How do you find my dishes, my little girl?" – "I wouldn have dishes like that home", she said, "I wouldn eat in them anyway …"
B.O.: Oh!
– "All full o holes." An then, then she made dinner – she made it theirselves, she didn know what they put in, eh? After she was breasin the pot, y'know, searin the pot – she put three places on the table – she never put hers though!
B.O.: Hhhh!
– "My little girl", she said, "how do you find my soup?" – "Well, my, I wouldn eat soup like that!" she said. "No sir! I wouldn eat soup with all kinds o beasts in – no sir!" she said. Okay. There was a head on it like a Bison [a brand of beer] –
B.O.: Huh!
– An er … after she was done, the dinner heat an that – knittin all great big holes – an narry an rise, oh! it was *fisire*! Anyway. "Now, little girl", she says, "your knittin is ready." So, the oldest one, she said "Now we know you're ugly – but", she says, "you'll be ten times uglier!"
B.O.: Oh ho ho!
– "Ten times uglier!" she said. Okay. An the other one – she says, "Yes, you're ugly – she'll be ten times uglier", she said, "an when you talk, you'll say, *Prout-prout ma mère*!"
B.O.: [Claps her hands] Ha ha ha!
– An er … dat's the way we heard it now – don't come tell me that! An er, so the youngest one, "Yes, we know she's ugly – but she'll be ten times uglier", she said, "an when she walks, she'll roll dung ahead of her!" I won't say 'pure' – dung, anyway. Ah! Anyhow, she gave her her knittin, an off she start. She hated her like pizen. Oh. She looked up, the old woman, she said "It's some sight." She said, "That's my sister!" – "Shut your mouth, you", she says, "an go on in the room." She went there in the room – an she said, er … "Where you come from, you?" – "*Prout-prout ma mère, prout-prout ma mère!*"
B.O.: Ha ha ha!
– She says, "Well, you're pretty", she says, "pound on", she says, "pound on." She says "Who made your knittin?" – "*Prout-prout ma mère!*" She couldn talk, eh? That's the witch she made into her.
B.O.: Oh my God!
– Now …
G.T.: That's the end of the story?
– It's not the end of the story.
G.T.: It's not?
– No.
G.T.: No.
– No.
G.T.: What happened then?
– *Tiens maudit gârs*, he winks!

B.O.: Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha!
– *I boit pas là!*
G.T.: Si si, je bois.
– *Ah, gardez, i boit pas, vous autes*! Look at me – I'm almos two bottles gone! *J'vais m'jaguer*!
G.T.: What is the end of the story?
– Anyway, well, the ole woman, she says, "Tomorrow night", she says, "there's a ball", she says, "at the king's, tomorrow night. An", she says, "we're goin. An you", she said, "you're not goin, you're stayin home." They had her – always in the room, eh? Always in the room, old clothes on, all tored.
B.O.: *Jalouses*!
– An er … you know, when it's a long time you told stories, it's hard, you know.
B.O.: *Ouais.*
– *Oui.* So anyhow, the nex marnin, the nex night, "Now", she says, now before she left there, she put the, the, she took some ashes, she put all over the floor – an she told her, "An when I comes home tonight", she said, "if it's not cleaned up", she said, "like it is, like it was, well", she said, "take care o yourself – you're gettin it!" Oh, they rigged up, her, dressed up in the highest style, her girl – they took off to the ball. So anyhow her, I'll tell you, she was there all alone, she started to cry. An cry. By n by her godmother come in – she says, "What you got cryin, my poor little girl?" – "Well", she says, "look a here", she says, "look at the mess I'm in", she said. "My stepmother an her daughter", she says, "are gone to the ball, they're gone to the ball an they put all that mess for me to clean", she says. "An I can't clean it", she says, "it's all ashes." – "Don worry about that", she said, "here's a stick", she says, "go down", she said "to a rock down in the garden", she says, "an strike it", she says. "You're gonna go to the ball", she said, "an be home", she says, "for sharp twelve – sharp eleven o'clock. Be back for leven o'clock." All right. So anyhow, the girl takes the stick an she strucked on the rock, oh my God! – she got a suit colour o the sun! An a – what she had? A … a little waggon – by God! – *c'est pas des chouals, c'est pas des chouals.* My gosh, *j'sais pas ça.* Well, it put it for a horse anyhow, I forgets it. An er … I bet she wouldn do that for you – well, she cleaned up all the house, my son! Jus like a deck – like it was there, clean! When he got there, my God! – pretty she was – the crew, they was all lookin at her. They was all "Who's that?" an the prince there, he was every dance was danced with her. He wouldn look at the other ones at all. The other one was *vilaine comme in diabe!*
B.O.: Hi hi hi!
– Anyhow, they was havin a talk, she takes off. Nobody seen her goin, y'know. She took off like the reindeer. Anyhow, when she got home, it all went from her, eh? An she got herelf back in her clothes, an – in the room. So by n by they come, them. "Well", they said, "we seed a pretty girl tonight – you'd see – she was dressed the colour of the sun!" – "No prettier than me", she said. Oh my God! They jumped on her, they almos kill her.
B.O.: Ah ha! Oh!
– An she says, "Tomorrow night, we're gonna see her again, I guess", she said, "we're goin again tomorrow night an you", she says, "you're gonna stay home." – "I don care", she said. So anyhow, the nex day passed, the night, she rigged herself all in white satin, all white vile dress, all everything she had, the ugly girl, eh? Do what you like, she was ugly. *A tait vilaine! Grand bon Dieu, a tait vilaine*! An – anyhow, fore dey left, they had to put the house full of – ashes again – an off they start. Ah! She was there cryin side the stove her. She caught her godmother come in again. "Ah!" she said, "what you got again tonight my little girl?" she says. "Well", she said, "look a here, what a mess! What a mess for me to clean!" – "Nothin for you to clean", she says. "You'll go", she says, "take that

stick", she says, "an go back to that same place you went last night, an go back to the ball", she says. "An be home", she says, "at twelve o'clock. Fair at twelve though!" she said. No! – No, it's leven o'clock. I said – first time was eleven – twelve …
G.T.: Mmm.
– D'you hear it before?
G.T.: No, that's what you said though.
– That's what I said?
G.T.: Yes … the first time was eleven o'clock.
B.O.: Yes, eleven o'clock the first time, yes.
– Yeah – but it's supposed to be ten. Three nights.
G.T.: On the first time was ten o'clock, the second time now is eleven o'clock.
– Now it's eleven o'clock, yeah.
G.T.: Right.
– "Now", she says, "be home, be back", she said, "for eleven o'clock." Okay. She goes down, struck on the rock, a dress the colour o the moon, now, an, an the waggon, an the horse, eh? Jumps in – gold slippers …
B.O.: *Phiou!*
– Goes down there, the king seen her, oh my God! – They was sittin down too, there – they didn know her – she was too pretty, I spose – an he danced every dance with her.
B.O.: *Phiou!*
– An her she wasn dancin at all, the ugly one! Blank!
B.O.: *Trop vilaine!*
– *Trop vilaine! … Gardez-la!* After, anyhow, she look at the time, just eleven o'clock – she takes off, my son, he nabbed her, but he missed her, eh? He said, "Me, tomorrow night, I'm not goin a miss you!" So anyhow, she goes home, she back evryting back again, an she goes behine the stove. By an by they comes in. "Well", she says, "if you'd know", she says, "the night she was pretty!" She says, "No prettier than me!" – "Oh!" she says, "mother, drop on to her an kill her, for God's sake!" They almos kill her, though, they almos kill her! "An tomorrow night", she says, "another one. Another ti – another ball again", she says, "tomorrow night an we're goin", she says. "An you're gonna stay to the house!" – "I don care!" she said. So the nex evenin comes – they done the same – they put all ashes on the floor – an they dressed up, an "Be sure that you're gonna have it done!" But her godmother has it all done, clean, when she came there. An they took off. By n by she comes in again her, the godmother. She was cryin.
"Now", she says, "go on", she says, "take that little stick", she says, "an go out the same place", she says, "an be home tonight at twelve o'clock. Sharp twelve o'clock you be home." Okay. She goes to the garden, she strikes on the rock, horse n carriage an – the horse n carriage the same colour as her there – colour o the stars tonight. She goes down, *mes amis de Dieu*, seen the mother, her stepmother, an her sister there, sittin down. Nobody takes her for a dance – blank. An her, every dance she was on the floor – every dance she was on the floor. But he use to count the time him, see eh? He knows the first time was ten o'clock, and – that night – for that was eleven, eh? He said, "Tonight it's twelve o'clock for sure but", he says, "I'd better watch er." Anyhow er, twelve o'clock, he was there, outside the door. When she passed, he nabbed her, he catch her by the – whatchercalls – by her slipper. Her golden slipper. But she never mind that, she took off the same. Well – not long she was home anyhow, she was behind the stove there in her same riggin – my gosh! she comes in, her mother an her sister. She said, "That girl was there again tonight." She said, "Now the prince", she said, "got one of her slippers – an tomorrow he's goin round – who fits the slipper is goin a be his wife." Jeepers crams, she was cuttin a piece off her! She used to cut a piece off her feet her – *pour souter* …

B.O.: *Ouais. Pour souter le slipper.*
– Okay. She was in her room, her. So anyhow, "In the hour", they said, "the prince is comin!" She dressed up her, pretty. "Come in", he says, er … "It suits you here, on your feet?" She try it. *Nom de Dieu!* She couldn fit it! She use to – she use to cut it, y'know – her heel – it was too tight! Fits no one o the two! He said, "That's not belong to you", he said, "you got no other girls?" – "No!" she said, "I've ony got a *Cendrilloux* there", she said. "You know, I'm ashamed to show her to you." *Mignonne!* She was there wid her, her, her *habit couleur de* – stars there. An one slipper on er feet, *mignonne*. They open er door, he almos fall down! An them too – *j'dirons* – fall down, to see er! An e goes an e gets her the slippers – just suit her feet. An she was dressed in the same, the same suit, eh? They almos died, they almos died, they almos died!
B.O.: *A taient vilaines ielles*.
– *Oui oui.* "You're gonna be my wife", he said. An they never had a chance to go see them gettin married, he was goin for all – but they fell in the river[7]. They ad the chance to see her gettin married.
B.O.: No!
– That's all I know, me.

Analysis

1. Life Crises

Holbek's thesis is that 'fairy tales'[8] – Märchen which end in a marriage, or with a successful conclusion following a marriage made earlier in ignominious circumstances – encapsulate one or more of three crises which occur in the lives of young people. The first of these deals with the conflict generated between parents and children, usually made explicit in Märchen by the departure from home of the young person, or by the young person being sent away. In real terms, the crisis is that of the post-pubescent youth asserting his or her individuality in face of various kinds of parental intolerance or abuse. The second crisis deals with the meeting of the sexes: boy meets girl; each learning how to deal with the opposite sex; winning the other person's love; and his or her liberation from attachment to the parent of the opposite sex. The third type of crisis involves the struggle of the young couple to establish a secure basis for married life, implying acceptance of the couple by the older generation[9].

[7] The expression 'to fall in the river', "tomber dans le rousseau', is a euphemism in Newfoundland French for 'to become pregnant'.
[8] See Holbek 1987, 450, for his justification of the use of this term.
[9] See Thomas (forthcoming); id. 1997, 1999. Each of these three articles deals with the same version of AaTh 313: The Girl as Helper in the Hero's Flight. In this tale, the second crisis forms its central core, with the third crisis being a substantial coda. The first crisis is all but absent from the tale. That several versions of the tale conclude, in Franco-Newfoundland tradition, with the resolution of the second crisis, underlines the centrality of the second crisis in Franco-Newfoundland culture itself, in which AaTh 313 is the most widely collected of Holbekian fairy tales. The present tale deals only with the first crisis, the second being no more than a footnote in essence, the third entirely absent.

In other words, Märchen deal with issues of maturation, or the process of maturation[10]. From a contemporary perspective, it is possible to consider the crises not only in terms of maturation but also in terms of male and female empowerment, though it is very unlikely that the crises would have been perceived, much less articulated, in that way in Franco-Newfoundland society before World War II. Rather, an underlying idea would have been the acquisition of power where it had not previously been held, and the ways in which such power was distributed between males and females. In both cases, those of maturation and empowerment, it should be stressed that these notions are latent rather than manifest, the tales conveying a subconscious message to the audience[11].

It should also be stressed that not all of the three crises are necessarily present in any given tale, and if they are, one of the crises will be given more extensive attention than the other two. It should also be understood that there is no formula for interpretation. Once a particular crisis has been identified, its resolution does not then follow an invariable pattern. On the contrary, my work to date suggests that although there are tales involving the same crises, different tales propose different solutions to those crises, all perhaps of equal validity. The present tale clearly deals with the first crisis, or illustrates one example of it, the conflict between parent and post-pubescent child, specifically the opposition between mother and daughter[12].

2. Tale Roles

Holbek was able to focus on the nature of life crises he identifies in fairy tales in part because of the way he made use of the Lévi-Straussian concept of semantic oppositions. This he borrowed from Elli Köngäs Maranda's articu-

[10] This is not a novel insight; Max Lüthi (1976) discusses the question at some length in ch. 8: The Fairy Tale as Representation of a Maturation Process. But Lüthi, like Lutz Röhrich (1991) and other scholars concerned with issues of interpretation, seeks universal or lasting truths; Holbek interprets tales from a specific time and place (nineteenth century Denmark), as I do with reference to tales from the second half of the twentieth century in Newfoundland, tales moreover which I collected from a still living tradition, in communities I was able to get to know intimately.

[11] For my use of the term 'empowerment' in this context, and the related terms 'empowered', 'unempowered' and 'disempowered', see Thomas (forthcoming). I gratefully acknowledge the useful discussion I had with J. D. A. Widdowson, who nudged me towards developing my thoughts on this subject.

[12] It is interesting to speculate that if my suggestion is valid, there may well be a significant connection between a community repertoire and the preponderance in real life of particular life-crises; tales which remain in a community repertoire may do so because the particular solutions they propose are those deemed over time to best fit the community ethics of social behaviour. In the case of Franco-Newfoundland folktales, of course, we are dealing with a former set of ethics, rather than what may now be current. Similarly, as I have argued elsewhere, fragmentary tales may survive precisely because the fragments embed a significant crisis, when all else is lost. See Thomas 2000 on this point.

lation of the triadic nature of personages in European folktales[13]. The Köngäs Maranda model adds to the two oppositions identified by Lévi-Strauss – male/female and high/low – a third, temporal dimension, young/old, and invites us to examine the folktale and its characters from the perspective of a cube-like structure. Thus, the four points of the top of the cube are given the acronyms HYM (High Young Male), HOM (High Old Male), HOF (High Old Female), and HYF (High Young Female). The base of the cube has at its points parallel to the top the acronyms LYM (Low Young Male), LOM (Low Old Male), LOF (Low Old Female), and LYF (Low Young Female). Each point therefore defines a character in terms of the triad status, age, and sex, each further distinguished by the oppositions high/low, young/old, and male/female.

What Holbek does subsequently is to examine the dynamics obtaining between the eight points (or tale roles) showing, in diagramatic form, the nature of conflict in different tales and, in so far as tales may illustrate it, status change of individuals in a tale. Holbek modifies Köngäs Maranda's vocabulary very slightly by replacing her term 'old' with 'adult', as being more precise[14]. There are, of course, several other potential oppositions identifiable in tales, oppositions which should certainly be examined for the deeper insights they may eventually afford us of the meaning of Märchen; but for Holbek's purposes, and mine too at this point, the semantic oppositions identified above remain central. They serve to help identify the particular crisis or crises represented in a given tale.

Holbek early on introduces into his analysis the notion of masculine and feminine tales. He notes that "nearly all fairy tales have two main figures, a hero and a heroine. One of them will be the more active in the introductory and central moves of the tale where the other is immobilized (under a spell, transformed into an animal, imprisoned etc.). The tales in which the hero plays the active part in these moves whereas the heroine is passive, will now be defined as *masculine* tales, fairy tales of masculine gender. The tales where these roles are reversed will be defined as *feminine* tales" (Holbek 1987, 161).

He refines this usage with reference to the tale roles emerging from the paradigmatic model devised by Köngäs Maranda: "in a masculine tale, the two main characters are the low-born young male (LYM) and the high-born young female (HYF). Conversely, the two main characters of the feminine tale are the low-born young female (LYF) and the high-born young male (HYM)" (Holbek 1987, 417). The remaining four tale roles include those of the high adult male (HAM), the high adult female (HAF), the low adult male (LAM) and the low adult female (LAF).

We note in passing that the phrase 'in opposition' refers to a semantic distinction. Tale characters which fill certain semantically opposed roles may or

[13] See Maranda 1971, 23; Holbek 1987, 347 f. and, for his application of Maranda's model, 419–434.
[14] Holbek 1987, 416.

may not be in conflict, even though the word 'opposition' may at times imply that they are. Indeed, some semantically opposed tale roles *are* in conflict with one another, whereas others, while opposed semantically, are not. There is rarely any substantial conflict between a LYF and a HYM, or a LYM and a HYF, though there frequently is conflict between the LYM or LYF and their HAM or HAF counterparts. Supernatural helpers, who are usually HAM or HAF too, are by definition not in conflict.

From a structural perspective of course, the oppositions are presented in terms of high versus low (status), youth versus adult, and male versus female. We suggest, however, that depending on the tale, some of these oppositions are of little or no significance. In *The Old Witch and the Ball of Wool*, for example, one might hypothesise an opposition between the LAM (the father) and the HAM (the king); but neither character plays any significant part in the tale. Indeed, both could be considered as two aspects of the same character, the father. The little significance of males of any kind in this tale further stresses the feminine nature of the tale. The three males are quite marginal; father, king and prince occupy the most minimal stages in the tale.

Earlier, while discussing the crises in Märchen, I suggested that the concept of empowerment might prove a useful one in certain circumstances. Thus, in the same way that Holbek modifies Köngäs Maranda's vocabulary, by substituting the word 'adult' for 'old', so do I suggest replacing 'high' with 'empowered', and its semantic opposite, 'unempowered'. One of the principal themes of Märchen, then, is that of empowerment, since the achievement of adult status does not imply any rapid aging on the part of the young couple. Indeed, rather than stressing the transition from youth to adulthood, emphasis is chiefly upon the transition from a state of unempowerment to one of empowerment. The heroine of *The Old Witch and the Ball of Wool* spends most of the tale distinctly unempowered; her empowerment (however distasteful it may seem to some contemporary viewpoints) comes from her marriage to the prince. This she achieves by conforming to certain desirable traits of appearance and behaviour.

Both aspects of the mother-figure in the tale – the 'bad' aspect in the form of the step-mother, the 'good' aspect in the form of the god-mother, are thus EAFs, as are the three old women who do the two girls' knitting (though we shall shortly recall Holbek's understanding of the nature of supernatural helpers). In some tales, where characters are enchanted for all or part of the tale, it may be appropriate and useful to refer to them as DAMs (Disempowered Adult Males) or DAFs (Disempowered Adult Females), for example. The notion of empowerment offers a greater linguistic flexibility that should in turn allow a more precise analysis of the characters and the tale roles they occupy.

The only male character to occupy centre stage in the tale, the HYM, or to use my terminology, the EYM, is the prince. I noted earlier that none of the male characters have any significant part to play in the tale, but it would be inaccurate to dismiss the prince completely. He does, after all, fall in love with

the heroine and pursue her single-mindedly, following her disappearance. He finds her with the help of her slipper. More to the point, he has the power to ensure the success of his search, and uses it appropriately.

That said, it is nonetheless clear that the significance of the tale, its meaning, turns about the relationships between its female characters. There are ostensibly seven female characters in the tale: heroine, step-mother, step-sister, the three old women, and the god-mother. The heroine appears to be the only UYF. But while her step-sister is certainly a YF, vis-à-vis her beautiful step-sister she is somewhat empowered, by virtue of the favouritism shown to her by her mother; but since any power she has derives from her mother, she is also in reality a UYF. Her nastiness towards her sister is an extension of her mother's jealousy. On the other hand, if one considers the step-sister to be an EYF, it is a role that is subsequently reversed; the more the beautiful sister becomes empowered, the less empowered becomes the step-sister. The step-mother, god-mother, and the three old women are all EAFs.

Applying Holbek's rules governing the characteristics of Märchen (to which we shall return in detail shortly), we may argue that several splits are apparent in the tale characters. We have already suggested that the father and king may be understood as a split of the father-figure, with the former a LAM or UAM, and the latter a HAM or EAM, though in this tale the distinction really only refers to status; a king by definition is of higher status than a commoner. In terms of empowerment, a king is likewise more empowered than a commoner, but neither king nor commoner are given the opportunity of demonstrating whatever power they might have. In this tale, their roles are negligeable.

If we return to the female characters, we suggest that while there are seven characters in the tale, there are no more than three female tale roles; it can be argued in fact that there are only two. Heroine and step-sister can be understood as 'good' and 'bad' aspects of the same person: the marriageable young woman. Each aspect represents a young woman's potential for becoming a 'good' or 'bad' wife. We will elaborate on this shortly. Similarly, the god-mother and step-mother may be understood as 'good' and 'bad' aspects of the mother figure, the step-mother representing the potential for maternal intolerance and abuse, the god-mother, the potential for maternal support, advice, and help towards a daughter.

The three old women may be considered a third level of female existence (illustrating the Holbekian rule, see below, that quality is often represented by quantity or, more pertinently, that supernatural helpers are external representations of inner qualities), that of the old, wise and respected female, the grandmother figure. In this respect, the three old women may simply be understood as an extension of the 'good' aspect of the mother figure. Their role in the tale is to give gifts which, in Holbek's thesis, are to be understood as external representations of the recipient's inherent potential. From this point of view, the significant tale roles are now reduced to two alone, the UYF and the EAF.

3. Magical or Symbolic Elements

Symbolic representation of the individual's and the collectivity's hopes, fears, desires, potential – these, according to Holbek, are at the roots of the so-called magical elements in Märchen. By 'symbolic', Holbek refers to the marvellous elements of tales, the magical motifs so often used as the defining characteristic of Märchen. His premise is that "symbolic elements refer to features of the real world as experienced by the storytellers and their audiences"[15]. He suggests, moreover, that his whole thesis can be characterized as his answer to the question: "… how does one get from 'there' (the real life in the storytelling community) to 'here' (the recorded tales)?"[16] He explains thus: "The symbolic elements of fairy tales convey emotional impressions of beings, phenomena and events in the real world, organized in the form of fictional narrative sequences which allow the narrator to speak of the problems, hopes and ideals of the community."[17] Given the nature of the crises he identifies in 'fairy tales', the narrator's concern in such tales is clearly with the difficulties of young adulthood.

Holbek identifies a series of seven rules which govern the metamorphosis of emotional impressions into symbolic expressions. These rules underlie Olrik's epic laws, Lüthi's 'Stiltendenzen', and in some cases are virtually identical with the 'mechanisms' for the formation of myths and dreams described by Freud and Rank.

These rules include the split, already referred to, in which conflicting aspects of a character are distributed upon different figures in the tale; particularization, in which aspects of persons, phenomena and events appear as independent symbolic elements; projection, in which feelings and reactions in the protagonist's mind are presented as phenomena occurring in the surrounding world; externalization, in which inner qualities are expressed by attributes or through action; hyperbole, in which intensity of feeling is expressed by exaggeration of the phenomena eliciting the feeling; quantification, in which quality is often expressed as quantity; and contraction, in which developments in space or time are contracted so as to appear as instantaneous changes, often by three stages[18].

The symbolic elements are generally construed in terms of Freudian theory, and it is on this basis that we shall undertake our examination of their significance in this tale. We shall not confine ourselves however to the purely symbolic, but make use, wherever helpful, of general Freudian theory. The Freudian interpretation of symbols derives from Freud's analysis of dreams[19], and Freud argued that many dream symbols exist in folktales and other kinds of

[15] Holbek 1987, 435.
[16] ibid.
[17] ibid.
[18] ibid., 435–444.
[19] Freud (1976).

folklore, often in more fully developed forms than in dreams[20]. More importantly to our case is the oft disputed Freudian explanation of dream symbols in terms of human sexuality. It was disagreement over this point that prompted several of his early followers to break with Freud and develop their own brands of interpretation. The acid test, however, is not whether this or that interpretative approach is the right one, but whether a particular approach seems plausible in terms of the human context in which it is being applied. As is clearly evident from earlier remarks, I share Holbek's view that a sexual interpretation of folktale symbols is appropriate. The view is reinforced if, as I believe it to be, Holbek's identification of the three crises of early adulthood enshrined in fairy tales is valid.

To come to the tale itself, the first 'magical' or symbolic element involves the apparent animation of the ball of wool being taken to be knitted. It jumps out of the heroine's arms, rolling ahead of her until it falls into a hole, at the bottom of which dwell three old women. The ball of wool is animated, we must assume, by the 'magic' or power of the old women, a power we shall not attempt to define further than the comment made earlier about this tale role (that the donor's gift is an external representation of the recipient's potential).

The ball of wool, if it is at all symbolic itself, stands as characteristic of woman's work. Amongst French Newfoundlanders, the whole process of working wool, from shearing and washing it to carding, spinning and knitting it, was an important part of women's work, still occasionally undertaken by some individuals. It was a central and characteristic female activity up to the 1960s. People still talk about 'carderies' (carding sessions) and 'fileries' (spinning sessions), a usually female-only cooperative social activity, often accompanied by singing and storytelling. Prestige would accrue to a woman whose work was of special quality, and at the very least, competence in this activity was expected of a young, marriageable woman. Before confederation with Canada in 1949, and indeed for several years after, women had to make their family's clothes out of their own wool.

That the action of the ball of wool is in some way sexual in nature is not at first apparent. Two different arguments support the contention that it is, however. The first is that from a Freudian perspective, subterranean regions, especially if access to them is by descent through a hole or a tunnel, represent access to the female body, particularly the vaginal canal and the womb. We need not however ask why the heroine should be attempting a symbolic return to the womb; Freud notes the phenomenon in dreams of inversion, e. g. entry

[20] As Freud (1976, 467 f.) notes "[…] this symbolism is not peculiar to dreams, but is characteristic of unconscious ideation, in particular among the people, and it is to be found in folklore, and in popular myths, legends, linguistic idioms, proverbial wisdom and current jokes, to a more complete extent than in dreams". The translator might better have said "for example in popular myths, etc.", rather than "and in popular myths, etc.", since all the terms mentioned are usually considered to be part of folklore.

into water may symbolize delivery from water, specifically uterine waters, i. e., birth. The heroine's descent into the hole may thus be interpreted symbolically as her (re-)birth as a post-pubertal woman, thus setting the scene for her subsequent development (or maturation, or empowerment). We also note that a room may also symbolize woman. The hole the heroine enters leads to a room in which the three old women live, and from which she leaves with her finished wool.

The second argument in favour of a sexual interpretation of the ball of wool's falling into a hole is of a quite different order, one not usually incorporated by Holbek. I refer to contextual data of the kind usually edited out of folktale texts when being prepared for publication. In her narration, Mrs Kerfont says: "the ball o wool […] started to roll, eh? An it fell in a hole, eh? … That's a thought!" Mrs Ozon, seated next to her, laughed loudly at the comment which, in context, left no doubt as to its sexual allusiveness[21]. Incorporating into one's interpretation such comments made during a tale's narration, though not strictly speaking part of the tale text, recalls Freud's own procedure of drawing on what folklorists refer to as contextual data, to help in his interpretation of dreams. Holbek could not of course make use of such performance data, as he was working with texts collected in nineteenth century Denmark, a period when most collectors (who of course lacked modern recording methods) habitually omitted or excised materials not felt to be part of the text proper. Mrs Kerfont's comment validates a sexual reading of this and other symbols.

The second 'magical' element in the tale is constituted by the gifts bestowed by the old women: greater beauty, roses falling from her cheeks, money rolling ahead of her when she walks, for the heroine; greater ugliness, dung rolling ahead of her when she walks, making farting noises when she talks, for the step-sister.

With one possible exception, I do not think that these gifts have a sexual meaning save in the very broadest sense. On the contrary, they can be understood as symbolic of desirable female virtues: beauty, of course, though as much internal as external[22]; the roses (which in other versions of the tale fall from the heroine's lips) may be understood to represent modest and pleasing speech; and the money, a symbol of the wealth accruing from honest toil. Conversely, the step-sister's gifts portray undesirable qualities in a marriageable daughter – ugliness, coarseness of speech, dirtiness. The possible exception (vis-à-vis a sexual meaning of the gifts) may lie in the money or dung rolling before the respective young women. In some versions of the tale, the money is

[21] Both Mrs Kerfont and Mrs Ozon made use of sexual allusions in the tales they told; see Thomas 1983, 105–107 or Thomas 1993, 77–79.

[22] The gifts, as always according to Holbek, are meant to represent potential qualities of the recipient, and exemplify his rule of externalization, in which inner realities are expressed by attributes or through action.

referred to as gold; Freud saw a connection between gold and faeces in dreams deriving from intestinal stimulus[23]. I do not myself see more here in the equation than I have already indicated. Let it be stressed that the virtues and vices represented by the gifts do not represent abstract ideals in Franco-Newfoundland society: I have been witness to more than one conversation in which mothers stressed such matters to their daughters.

The concluding source of 'magic' is, like the old women, an EAF: the god-mother who gives the heroine a 'stick' which, when tapped against a rock, provides her with, on successive days, dresses 'the colour o the sun', 'o the moon', and 'of the stars', as well as a horse and carriage, so she can attend the ball in proper style. In terms of Freudian symbolism, the 'stick', an elongated object, may be understood as a phallic symbol. Using it appropriately brings: beautiful dresses, symbolic of wealth and general well-being, and horse and carriage (a waggon at first), suggesting the potential to gradually improve one's lot. A horse and carriage allow the heroine to travel to the ball. Travel has been interpreted as sexual intercourse (associated with honeymoons), and in the context may be understood as a symbol of things to come. We have noted earlier that the god-mother probably stands for the 'good' aspect of the mother figure, and we may therefore more broadly understand the 'gifts' as advice to the dutiful daughter, advice suggesting a path towards, and the consequences of, a successful marriage; or, as Holbek suggests, external representations of inner qualities.

While there are no further classical 'magical' elements in this version of the tale, from a Freudian perspective it is possible to identify other symbols which may bear on an understanding and interpretation of the tale. During the heroine's visit to the abode of the three old women, there is frequent reference to 'all kinds o beasts' – in the bed, in the soup. 'Beasts' – frogs are mentioned in the soup – can be understood as genital symbols but particularly, in Freudian terms, as small children. We suggest that the 'beasts' – external representations of the heroine's internal feelings – may well represent an initial fear of childbirth, further indicated by the lumpy bed, the cracked plates and seemingly unappetizing soup. But the heroine, who deals appropriately with the old women, heeding their advice, performing their chores, reaps the rewards: she will be fulfilled as a woman. The step-sister presumably reaps her just rewards

[23] For a specific folklore reference, see Dundes 1984, 80–82, where the author takes up Freud's thesis on the subject of anal eroticism, with reference to this tale type. The actions of the step-mother, who throws ashes on the floor that the heroine has to clean up, may be understood as a reflection of her own anal-erotic fixation, which is often made manifest, according to Freud, by an obsession with cleanliness. It is certainly true that, in my experience, the majority of Franco-Newfoundland housewives kept their homes meticulously clean. The ashes strewn on the floor for the heroine to clean were a reality, as all homes at one time (up to the 1960s when electricity was installed, and many, much longer after) kept wood-burning stoves in their kitchens; ashes often found their way to the floor.

too, hinted at by the fact that no one will dance with her at the ball, and by the fact that she then 'falls in the river': symbols perhaps of a failure to find a husband, and subsequent unwed motherhood. Neither of these likelihoods would have been appealing to young women.

One other symbol of interest is the slipper. A hollow object, it is representative of the vagina or uterus. Only the prince is able to fit the slipper to the right foot. Not symbolic, but an example of Holbekian contraction (developments extended in space and time are contracted so as to appear as instantaneous changes, often in three stages), is the injunction to the heroine to return from the ball at ten, eleven and twelve o'clock respectively on the three nights of the ball. The dutiful daughter, who follows her (god=good) mother's advice is rewarded by later and later curfews. This certainly has its parallels in the real world[24].

4. Conclusion: The Meaning of The Old Witch and the Ball of Wool

Based on our discussion of the relationships between the story's characters, it is evident that the principal tale roles involve a single opposition, manifested in the number of Holbekian splits. The primary tale role is that of the daughter figure: that is to say, the daughter in two guises, the dutiful, obedient, hard-working, uncomplaining young woman on the one hand, the ugly, disrespectful, mean, dirty and lazy young woman on the other. The principal opposition in the tale is between the UYF in her dual aspects, the 'good' and 'bad' daughter characters, and the EAF in her dual aspects, the 'good' god-mother and the 'bad' step-mother. The EAF may also include a further split, including the three old women, as representatives of both 'good' and 'bad' aspects of the mother figure; they are the source of good and bad gifts. But it might be more in keeping to see here three generations of women and their relationships, real or symbolic: the daughter, the mother, and the grand-mother.

The life crisis reflected in this tale concerns the conflict between the generations, specifically between mother and daughter, presented in such a way as to illustrate how generational conflict may be circumvented – by being a 'good' girl – or, conversely, guaranteed, by being a 'bad' girl. Holbek's definition of this life crisis notes that it may begin with a departure of the young person, or by the young person being sent away, as is the case here. A departure may mean in Freudian terms death, but because of the destination, a return to the womb, as it were, the departure clearly signals a rebirth. The 'good' aspect of the daughter figure emerges from the subterranean home of the three old

[24] The heroine's abrupt departure has the effect of keeping the prince on his toes, eager for more. While living with families on the Port-au-Port Peninsula, I overheard from time to time discussions between daughters, sisters and mother, about the advisability, or otherwise, of keeping a suitor waiting, in more ways than one. The consensus was that it was a good tactic.

women with her desirable potential enhanced. She has been reborn as a marriageable and desirable young woman, whereas her *alter ego* is reborn as marriageable, but very undesirable. These virtues may seem simplistic today, but they were real enough in Franco-Newfoundland society in the past, and are still promoted amongst many women.

The young woman who fulfills these societal requirements, even though they may be ideals, will find her Prince Charming, get married, have children, work hard, and eventually find contentment in her role as a mature, adult female, to become eventually a respected elder. The many women I interviewed from 1970 on might not have articulated these ambitions in quite this way, but it is fair to say that the majority would have subscribed to the general idea, more perhaps among those who reached maturity before the sixties or seventies, less subsequently, as new ideals began to replace the old.

It is quite possible to recognise the real-world equivalents of the three old women. In Franco-Newfoundland tradition, old women were generally accorded considerable respect by both sexes, and in some cases understood to be repositories of certain kinds of specialized knowledge and wisdom. Nowhere was this attitude more evident than in the person of the 'chaze-femme' (sage-femme), the community midwife (often the storehouse of plant and herbal lore). The midwife, in Franco-Newfoundland tradition, was also known more commonly as 'la vieille sorciaise', the old witch.

It is the old witch who instructs the heroine in the ways of becoming a desirable woman and, once the instruction is complete, 'delivers' her back to the outside world. There, with the help of a 'good' mother figure, she achieves her dream of marrying the handsome prince – a young man with sufficient power to ensure her the security she will need as a married woman and mother.

The heroine begins her career in the tale as an unempowered young female. Her encounter with the old women enhances her potential, and her encounter with the god-mother alerts her to her sexuality, though in a muted, low-key manner. Her awareness of her growing empowerment is manifest by her assertions to step-mother and step-sister that she is as beautiful as the unknown woman who has captured the heart of the prince.

The tale goes no further than the resolution of this particular crisis. Other tales explore other facets of this crisis, or the problems and solutions encountered in the second and third crises young people may face as they mature. This tale offers in simple and compressed terms an outline of desirable qualities in a young woman, the way to acquire them, and an equally simple but reasonable conclusion.

The tale is clearly a feminine tale. It is one which would have reinforced community values of the day, from a female perspective. In masculine tales, the sexual symbolism is usually more overt; in this tale it is muted, allusive. Young women growing up in the 1920s and 1930s, and indeed much later into the century, often had but the vaguest of knowledge about sex; it was a somewhat hazy notion, centred around babies and small children.

Until relatively recent times, young women also married at a quite young age. The hard life all Newfoundlanders endured prepared them for the work ahead, and storytelling introduced young females to some of the community's expectations. The didactic aspect of the tale stresses what women thought their gender should be like; there is hardly any mention at all of what women's expectations of men might be. It was a tale by women, for women – particularly for young women – reflected in the field experience by the fact that all versions collected were obtained from female narrators alone, and none from men.

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Abstract

This interpretation of AaTh 480 + AaTh 510, collected within a still living narrative context, is based on the late Bengt Holbek's theory, propounded in his 1987 *Interpretation of Fairy Tales*. It is argued that the tale deals with the first of three life-crises found in such narratives, to wit, conflict between the generations, specifically between mother and daughter. It is proposed that the *Cinderella* tale, more fully comprehensible when preceded by *The Spinning-Women by the Spring*, offers a solution to the problem faced by the marriageable daughter: how best to win the love of a man. Although the answers to this question may seem dated at the present time, in the social and narrative context in which the tale was told in the 20th century, it offers what was deemed to be sound advice by the often largely female audiences.

Résumé

Cette interprétation des contes-type AaTh 480 + AaTh 510, recueillis dans un contexte narratif vivant, se fonde sur la théorie de feu Bengt Holbek, proposée dans son *Interpretation of Fairy Tales* (1987). Nous proposons que le conte s'adresse à la première des trois crises de vie qui se retrouvent dans ce genre de conte, à savoir, le conflit entre les générations, plus précisément entre mère et fille. Nous proposons aussi que le conte de *Cendrillon*, beaucoup plus compréhensible quand il est précédé par *Les fées*, offre une solution au problème confronté par la fille en âge de mariage: comment gagner l'amour d'un homme. Quoique les réponses à cette question puissent paraître aujourd'hui démodées, dans le contexte social et narratif du conte, raconté pendant le XXe siècle, le conte propose néanmoins des conseils considérés valables par des assistances composées généralement de femmes, jeunes et moins jeunes.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Interpretation einer im lebendigen Erzählkontext aufgezeichneten Kombination der Erzähltypen AaTh 480 + AaTh 510 basiert auf der 1987 von Bengt Holbek in seinem Werk *Interpretation of Fairy Tale* dargelegten Theorie. Demnach bezieht sich das hier untersuchte Märchen auf die erste von drei Lebenskrisen, die sich in dieser Gattung finden, nämlich den Generationenkonflikt, hier zwischen Mutter und Tochter. Darüber hinaus bietet das *Aschenputtel*-Märchen, das besser verständlich ist, wenn es auf das *Frau Holle*-Märchen folgt, auch eine Lösung des Problems, das sich der heiratsfähigen Tochter stellt: wie sie die Liebe eines Mannes gewinnen kann. Obwohl die Antworten auf diese Fragen heute überholt scheinen mögen, bot das Märchen in dem gesellschaftlichen und erzählerischen Kontext, in dem es im 20. Jahrhundert vorgetragen wurde, Ratschläge, die von einem überwiegend weiblichen Publikum für passend gehalten wurden.